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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 20th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MONGBE (Benin)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 91: DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (continued)

1. Mr. AL-SULTAN (President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)), said that, while there were currently unprecedented possibilities for making progress on some long-standing questions, such as those of the Middle East and South Africa, other problems were emerging, linked in large part to the frustration and despair caused by growing poverty, which was aggravating social, ethnic and regional tensions in many areas.

2. In keeping with its mandate, in the Middle East the Fund had initiated action to prepare a programme to help generate employment and raise food production in Gaza and Jericho. IFAD was also ready to play a role in supporting the positive changes taking place in South Africa and to start development operations by United Nations agencies in that country as soon as it became possible and when South Africa became a member of IFAD.

3. Unfortunately, in various parts of the world, over a billion people were still living in absolute poverty, which placed a tremendous strain on the social fabric and weakened political institutions. Unless the poor were brought fully and equitably into the productive process, prospects for sustainable development in many countries would remain problematic.

4. Widespread and chronic poverty created great vulnerability among large parts of the population to external events such as droughts or civil strife, which could quickly lead to famines and cause mass migration, as had recently happened in Burundi. Migration placed great strains on receiving countries, causing social problems and affecting their potential for development. Moreover, poverty was closely related to environmental degradation, since, in their efforts to survive, the rural poor had little choice but to overuse natural resources.

5. In its 15 years of existence, IFAD had shown that poverty alleviation could be economically viable, remunerative and environmentally beneficial. Poverty alleviation investment projects often had rates of return of more than 15 per cent, which compared favourably with conventional investments. There was therefore no need for a trade-off between supporting economic growth, on the one hand, and addressing poverty and hunger, on the other. Nevertheless, the level of investments in poverty alleviation projects was not commensurate with the extent of the problem. His delegation hoped that the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development and the agenda for development would bring about a greater degree of consensus on the required response to the problems of the poor.

6. While the relaxation of international tensions should allow attention to focus on the elimination of hunger and poverty, support for development cooperation was ebbing. That was apparently due, to a lack of awareness of what could be done to combat poverty and hunger and the failure to realize the peril of not acting. It should be clear that, in order to make use of the peace

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(Mr. Al-Sultan)

dividend and reap the benefits of the end of the cold war, it was essential to address the problems of poverty at the local, national and multilateral levels.

He hoped that the United Nations would promote greater awareness of the urgency of cooperative action.

7. At the same time that efforts were being made to increase the level of assistance, it was essential to ensure that available funds were used in the most cost-effective way. He had initiated a systematic process to make the Fund's own operations even more economical and effective by streamlining the project development process and giving greater attention to implementation issues. The Fund was considering how to ensure that projects had a real impact on the daily lives of the rural poor and that that impact was maintained.

8. IFAD was working with its partner agencies in the Joint Consultative Group on Policy in order to harmonize approaches at policy and operational levels. Those endeavours concerned issues that went to the heart of international development cooperation, namely, finding new ways for external donors and beneficiaries to work together. A key element in that effort was to elicit the active participation of beneficiaries in project design and implementation. Participation enabled beneficiaries to undertake future projects by themselves, which was the beginning of a process of self-sustaining growth. That goal could be reached if the necessary external support and the domestic commitment were sustained.

9. With regard to the fourth replenishment of IFAD resources, the Fund was exploring changes that would help to make its future replenishments more rapid and generate higher levels of resources.

10. The poor had shown that, when given the opportunity, they could respond through their own efforts to escape from their poverty. At a time when the goal of a world without hunger was within reach, the international community must not falter but should reinforce its sense of solidarity by achieving a world in which all people had the right to food.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.